

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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ACDA-07 IO-13 OMB-01 /087 W
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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4280
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN
COMIDEASTFOR
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI
CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 1068

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS ET
SUBJECT: REDEPLOYMENT OF EPMG FORCES IN ERITREA

1. WITHIN THE LAST TWO WEEKS THE EPMG MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN ASMARA HAVE DIRECTED A REDEPLOYMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF THEIR FORCES IN ERITREA WHICH MAY BE THE FORERUNNER TO A MORE COMPLETE CONCENTRATION OF FORCES OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. THE OUTPOSTS ABANDONED IN THE ASMARA AREA INCLUDE THE GARRISON AT COAZIEN (14 KM. N. OF ASMARA), THE WATER FILTRATION PLANT AT ADI NEFAS (18 KM. SSW OF ASMARA) AND THE FORMER ETHIO-NIPPON COPPER MINING SITE AT DEBAROA (39 K. SSW OF ASMARA). THE LATTER POST WAS EVACUATED ONLY AFTER A SHARP ENGAGEMENT WITH INSURGENTS IN WHICH THE EPMG FORCE SUFFERED MODERATE CASUALTIES. THE REBELS
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THEN MADE OFF WITH MOST OF THE MACHINERY, ESPECIALLY THE GENERATORS, WHICH HAD BEEN LEFT BY THE MINING COMPANY.

2. THIS REDEPLOYMENT FOLLOWS THE EVACUATION OF EPMG TROOPS AND OFFICIALS FROM ADI TECKESAN (39 KM. NW OF ASMARA) FOLLOWING THE FIGHTING ALONG THE KEREN ROAD IN LATE NOVEMBER. OTHER EPMG POSTS

KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN ABANDONED IN PREVIOUS MONTHS INCLUDE HAGAZ (ABOUT 25 KM. WEST OF KEREN) IN JULY AND GOGNI (40 KM. WEST OF BARENTU) IN SEPTEMBER.

3. WHILE IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO CONCLUDE DEFINITELY THAT THIS CONSOLIDATION AND REDEPLOYMENT SIGNALS A MAJOR POLICY SHIFT BY THE EPMG, OBSERVERS SPECULATE THAT THESE MOVES PRESAGE A GENERAL CONCENTRATION OF FORCE IN ERITREA TO FREE ETHIOPIAN TROOPS FOR DEPLOYMENT ALONG THE SOMALI BORDER IN ANTICIPATION OF THE INDEPENDENCE IN 1977 OF TFAI. AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION IS THAT THESE MOVES ARE NECESSARY TO PROVIDE FORCES TO MOVE TO THE BEGENDIR REGION TO QUELL EDU AND OTHER DISSIDENT ACTIVITY. THIS LATTER THEORY IS GIVEN SOME SUPPORT BY REPORTS THAT IN RECENT DAYS FLAME TROOPS, PREVIOUSLY BASED AT SECOND DIVISION HQ ARE NO LONGER IN EVIDENCE.

4. THERE IS A REPORT THAT THE ETHIOPIAN MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE IS VISITING ASMARA AS OF DEC. 18, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW FOR WHAT PURPOSE. IF HIS VISIT IS LINKED WITH A MAJOR REDEPLOYMENT, THERE HAVE YET TO BE ANY REPORTS OF DEPARTURE FROM ASMARA, EITHER BY ROAD OR BY AIR, OF SIGNIFICANT EPMG FORCES.

5. COMMENT: IF ONE WERE TO SPECULATE FURTHER ON A MAJOR REDEPLOYMENT, IT WOULD SEEM LIKELY THAT THE EPMG AUTHORITIES WOULD WISH TO CONCENTRATE THEIR FORCES IN AT LEAST THE TEN FOLLOWING TOWNS AND CITIES IN ERITREA: ASMARA, MASSAWA, ASSAB, KEREN, AGORDAT, BARENTU, TESSENNEY, DECAMARE, ADI URGU AND DONGOLO. SUCH A CONSOLIDATION WOULD POSIT THE ABANDONMENT AT LEAST TEMPORARILY OF SOME OF THE FOLLOWING TOWNS: QARORA, NACFA, AFABET, CONFIDENTIAL

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AI COTA, AREZA, ADI CAIEH, SENAFE AND POSSIBLY EVEN ADI QUALA. SUCH A SHIFT WOULD MEAN THE EPMG SURRENDERING ALL OF SAHEL PROVINCE TO THE INSURGENTS WHILE HOLDING OUTPOSTS ALONG THE THREE PRINCIPLE ARTERIES IN ERITREA; I.E. THE TESSENNEY-ASMARA ROAD, THE ADWA-ASMARA ROAD AND THE MASSAWA-ASMARA ROAD. INDICATIONS OF ANY SUCH CONSOLIDATION OF FORCES WILL HAVE TO BE MONITORED CLOSELY OVER THE NEXT MONTH.
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